

ARCHITECTURE | DESIGN | PEOPLE

# PERSPECTIVE

APRIL 2019

## SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

A WALK TO REMEMBER  
AVENUE OF STARS

GREEN MASTER PLAN  
SINGAPORE ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN

FUTURE LEGACY  
UNSTUDIO'S CODE OF PRACTICE

YABU PUSHHELBERG'S SHARED VISION  
+ AMBIENTE: GLOBAL PRODUCT TRENDS

HKD 60



917716061255002



Restored art deco frontage of Six Senses Maxwell, with interiors by Jacques Garcia

# LAH LAH LAND

BY REBECCA LO

As Singapore enjoys its moment in the spotlight, courtesy of *Crazy Rich Asians* and the Trump-Kim summit, *Perspective* takes a closer look at its design gems, old and new

Two significant events put Singapore on the global map in 2018. In June, it was the location for the historic meeting between US president Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, the first between the leaders of the two countries. The summit took place at the Capella Singapore hotel, an adaptive reuse conversion of a 1960s office block by Foster + Partners with interiors by André Fu of AFSO. In August, the film adaptation of Kevin Kwan's novel *Crazy Rich Asians* brought a glammed-up Singapore to big screens across the globe. Filmed on a US\$30-million budget, it scored US\$240 million at the box office and two sequels are in the works. While most cinemagoers remember Constance Wu's sensitive portrayal of the American-Chinese fish out of water or Michelle Yeoh's scene-stealing cattiness, design aficionados will have noticed the city's architectural landmarks, including CHIJMES, Marina Bay Sands and Raffles.

Ask any Singaporean about the hype the city-state is receiving lately, and the response is typically a mixture of pride and drop-the-mic attitude. Singaporeans love the melting pot of Chinese, Malay and Indian cultures that permeate every aspect of their tropical city. With its citizens' universal reverence for prime minister Lee Hsien Loong, son of first prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, and a tendency to toe the party line, Singapore is a textbook example of how a former British colony became an Asian tiger in a mere half century. And it has design clout to boot.

"The challenge about being a multicultural country is that there is always this need for racial equality – no one race should be more prominent than another in terms of design aesthetic," observes Singapore native Kelley Cheng, creative director with The Press Room. "You end up having to subdue everything and the aesthetic becomes very global and modern. So you see a lot of very minimalistic and modernist aesthetics here."

Sure enough, *Minimalism* is the title of the first site-specific exhibition at the National Gallery Singapore, itself an adaptive reuse of the 80-year-old City Hall and Supreme Court buildings by studioMilou Singapore and CPG Consultants, which opened in 2015. Running until April 14,

the exhibition was curated by Robert Cheng of Brewin Design Office, which recently completed contemporary Chinese restaurant Blossom at Marina Bay Sands.

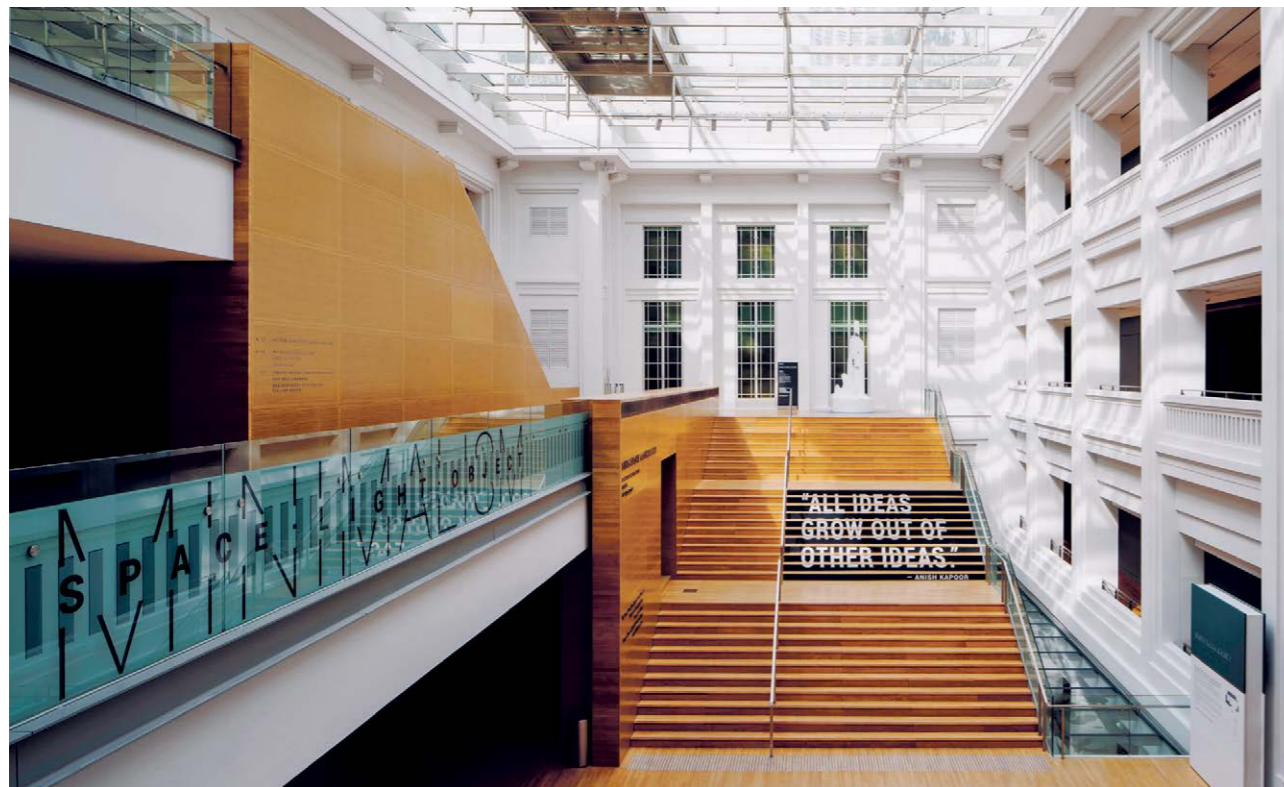
Singapore's hospitality venues are some of its most dynamic spaces. Just down the road from the National Gallery, on Coleman Street, Grand Park City Hall Hotel is the flagship of the Park Hotel Group. It's a tech-driven property with check-in and room controls via a dedicated app and nods to the city's culture with locally commissioned art in its refurbished interiors by Studio HBA Singapore, and in the graphics on its collaterals and backdrops.

On the other side of the National Gallery, in the Mandarin Oriental hotel, MO Bar has a look inspired by Malay sea nomads. It was designed by Wilson Associates Singapore's senior designer Tiffany Chia, who worked with branding consultant Proof & Company, visual consultant ACRE, uniform designers ESTA, and lighting designer Project Light Design.

Opened in December, in 14 low-rise shophouses dating from 1929 in the Tanjong Pagar district, Six Senses Maxwell joins Six Senses Duxton to make up Six Senses Singapore. Its 138 guest rooms were created by French interior designer Jacques Garcia.



Maison Miaja, a three-level art and event complex by Miaja Design Group



The National Gallery Singapore hosts the *Minimalism* exhibition by Brewin Design Office



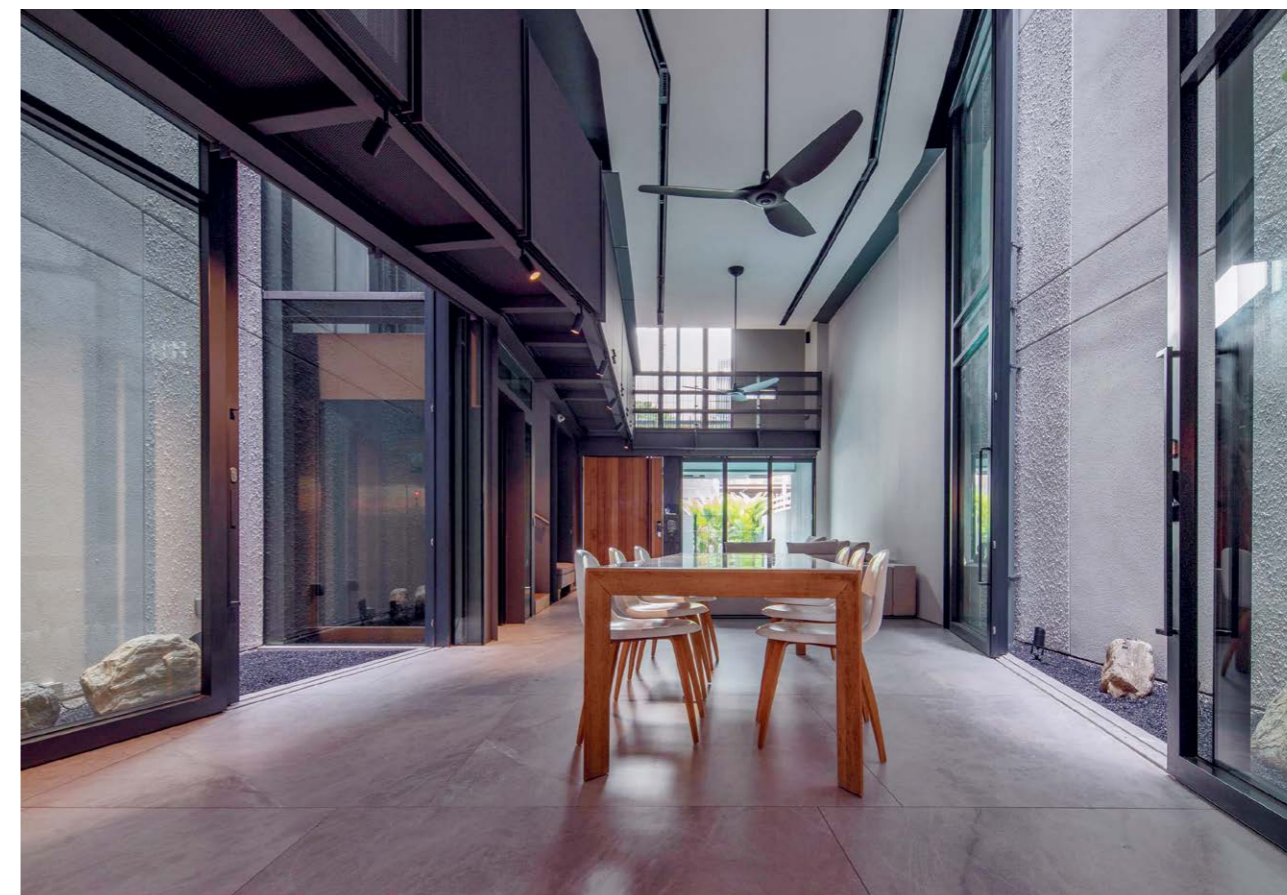
MO Bar by Wilson Associates, inspired by Malay sea nomads



Jewel at Changi Airport features Singapore's largest indoor garden



Family home: Lucky Book Store by Chang Yong Ter



Meshed Up House by RT+Q is a two-storey terrace with attic, mezzanine and swimming pool

“As designers, we repeatedly go back to reference the old shophouse – the Peranakan aesthetics – when we need a melting-pot look,” Cheng says. “Singapore society is so globalised. Sadly, younger generations of Chinese children can hardly speak Chinese, Indian kids are speaking less Tamil, and Malay kids are also more Westernised. To be honest, our melting-pot look is really a modernist, Westernised aesthetic.”

One of Singapore’s most famous colonial buildings, Raffles Hotel, is to reopen in August after a three-year renovation, with 115 suites by New York’s Alexandra Champalimaud. Also new is La Dame de Pic restaurant, the first foray into Asia for chef Anne-Sophie Pic of the three-Michelin-starred Maison Pic, in southeast France.

And from April, Jewel at Changi Airport will greet all those visitors with Singapore’s largest indoor garden, along with shops, restaurants, dedicated play areas and accommodation within architecture by Moshe Safdie, who designed Marina Bay Sands. Among the new stores is the 180sqm (1,900sqf) DuraSport, designed by Colin Seah of Singapore’s Ministry of Design as an immersive, futuristic R&D environment for sports enthusiasts.

He is one of a tribe of talented Singapore architects and designers, including the well-known WOHA Architects. Cheng lists other local heroes who also deserve recognition: “MKPL Architects, ipli Architects, SCDA Architects and Chang Yong Ter – the latter is exceptional, as he crafts every detail in every house he designs,” he says. “What I find admirable is their ability to consistently produce sensitive, sensible, functional and yet aesthetically pleasing works over the years. Consistency is the most important quality of defining a good architecture firm. It sounds easy enough, but battling through every client, every brief, every site constraint, every structural impossibility... it really takes a lot for a firm to maintain quality in every single project.”

Chang Yong Ter’s sensitive adaptive reuse of shophouses includes Lucky Book Store for a young family in Joo Chiat, while Rene Tan of RT+Q turned a terraced property on Watten Rise into the Meshed Up House for a multi-generational family. Completed in 2018, the plan employs a double bend to create skinny atria between the living space and party walls to either side, allowing natural light to pierce through the centre of the narrow structure. And on Astrid

Photo: Jewel: Changi Airport Development

Hill, Singapore-based British architect Guz Wilkinson last year completed a cantilevered house with extensive green space to reflect the owners’ love for gardening.

“[Australian architect] Kerry Hill has revolutionised the aesthetics of the tropical house in Singapore,” Cheng says. “He was certainly one of the pioneers who gave a new definition to the tropical house while retaining the functions of the pitch roof and the cross-ventilation stack effect typical of old Malay attap houses. The language of the modern tropical house continues today; the essence of it is not as much in certain aesthetics as it is in encompassing certain quintessential functions and, from there, allowing form to follow function.”

On the commercial front, Singapore-based French designer Isabelle Miaja recently completed Maison Miaja near Robertson Quay. The three-level complex includes a floor devoted to installations and digital art, another for photography, and a studio floor that showcases some of Miaja’s custom designs, including hexagon lighting for Sofitel SO Singapore.

After losing a lengthy battle to save his iconic 1976 residential tower block Pearl Bank, including his

penthouse, Singapore-based American architect Ed Poole has moved his home office to a second-storey corner space in a building dating to 1937 on Tiong Bahru. Due to be completed in April, its contemporary spaces will open to greenery via a reinstated wraparound balcony.

“Being land-scarce, our government has not much choice but to be quite brutal with elimination,” Cheng says. “The decision to remove Bukit Brown – historically, a highly significant cemetery – was met with much disapproval, but it still had to go. Some of the more significant modernist buildings in Singapore, such as Pearl Bank and Golden Mile, will be gone too. Sadly, only the really old relics like shophouses and some historical colonial architecture are being kept, while some modernist gems from the ’50s, ’60s and ’70s are slowly being bulldozed away. In the end, we will only be left with the very new and very old, and nothing in between. I fear that we are not conserving chronologically – what is post-colonial but architecturally significant will all be gone. Conserving just the very old is as good or as bad as keeping antiques at home. What does it serve besides to occasionally be admired for a few minutes? But I guess conserving something is better than nothing.” ■

Photo: Shooting Gallery Asia